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ABSTRACT

The history and ongoing activities of Project DAIRE, a capacity-building effort undertaken by the Delaware State Department of Public Instruction to coordinate educational information and manpower resources through a central information service and to provide linking agents to facilitate the use of information in effecting school improvements, is comprehensively outlined. The process of institutionalization, which saw the merger of the Information Search and Retrieval Unit (ISRU), the Department of Public Instruction Library, and the office of the National Diffusion Network State Facilitator as the Delaware Dissemination Network (DDN), is detailed. Also described are the role of the Delaware Educational Assessment program in establishing links with the educational community, the functions of the DDN, and the development of the Delaware Educational Improvement Model. A table summarizes the achievements of the project between FY1976 and FY1980. Equity of access to information by school districts throughout the state is briefly discussed, and the measurable impact and benefits of the project are delineated. (JL)

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PROJECT DAIRE

(Delaware Application of Information and Research in Education)

FINAL REPORT
FY 76-80

Submitted to

THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

By

DR. WILMER E. WISE, State Director
Planning, Research and Evaluation Division

DELAWARE STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
DIVISION OF PLANNING, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

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MAJOR COMPONENTS

Project DAIRE, Delaware Application of Information and Research to Education, was conceived as a capacity building thrust for dissemination in Delaware. Through this conceptualization, all participants in the state's educational enterprise were to have fuller access to educational knowledge, the outcomes of research and indepth assistance for practitioners.

This capacity building effort concerned itself with two traditional aspects of dissemination, (1) coordinating existing information and manpower resources through establishing resource linkage and a centralized information services unit, and (2) providing field agent linkers to maximize use of information in affecting school improvements. The concerns guided the activities of the project throughout its five-year NIE funding history and in amended form, remain. The coordinated information services has become a part of the DPI service constellation with one full-time information specialist providing more than 700 searches per year. The field agent concern was explored and experimented with during the project life, and it was concluded that the school improvement efforts could most effeciently result from all DPI supervisors acting as field agents.

The DPI dissemination Capacity is now well established with school teachers, administrators, and other segments of the education community using the service and participating in its support.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

INFORMATION COMPONENT

The Department of Public Instruction Information Search and Retrieval Unit (ISRU) began operation in 1975 in the Jason Library on the Delaware State College Campus, a location three miles from the Department of Public Instruction Office in central Dover. The ISRU location was predicated on the fact

that the Department's ERIC collection, the state's only collection, was, at that time, on loan to the Jason Library. As search services enlarged and the interface between information searches and school improvement linkages developed, it became clear that the ISRU could more efficiently serve the goals of the project and of statewide dissemination by relocating to the Department headquarters.

During the summer of 1978, the ISRU was merged with the Department of Public Instruction Library, a library of education periodicals and reference materials. Merging the ISRU and the Library brought a number of direct benefits to the dissemination activities of the SEA. Two major benefits are, the ISRU has the largest collection of education periodicals in the state and instant access to the Department's professionals for assistance and search referral. Integrating the ISRU into the SEA facility also associated the resource base more closely with the project's field linkage activities and the State Facilitator.

Merging the project with the State Facilitator under the title of Delaware Dissemination Network (DDN) provided mutual and non-competative benefits to both dissemination efforts. Joint publicity was developed and joint sponsorship of dissemination meetings resulted.

From an organizational point of view, the ISRU, once brought into the SEA, began to get the visibility it needed if it were to become a part of the Department. The work with all branches of the Department, State Board of Education, and the legislature, proved the need and utility of up-to-date information that can be quickly retrieved and used for decision-making.

With the value of the ISRU established, the funding for post project continuation was reviewed. Two client groups appeared to be the most logical supporters of the services, SEA, and the LEAs. Therefore, the FY 81 budget was prepared to support current information service level with

approximately half of the funding coming from each user group. This budget was approved by the State Board of Education and as of this writing, September 1980, the Information Search and Retrieval Unit is supported by SEA funds and subscriptions from all public school districts in Delaware and a few nonpublic schools. Subscription negotiations are underway with most post secondary and higher education user groups.

The information service component has become part of the SEA operation and its present fiscal support configuration attests to the worth of the service. As part of the institutionalization process, the ISRU adopted a new name, Library Information Center.

LINKAGE COMPONENT

Establishing linkages between and among the various actors and institutions in the educational community was a primary objective of our project efforts. Extant resources such as the Delaware Educational Assessment Program, the name for our statewide testing program, provided a uniform student achievement criteria for local school and district needs assessment endeavors. By reviewing achievement data and reviewing local resources and institutional variables, the project assisted local school staff in delimiting their needs and arranging them in priority. These activities were conducted in a collaborative manner with local staff, project staff and other SEA staff.

Once the areas of need were established, the project resource base was used extensively to determine potential solutions. Potential solutions included JDRP validated projects as well as other ideas. The relationship between the NDN state facilitator and our dissemination has, by design, been most positive and mutually supportive; both efforts operate from the Planning, Research and Evaluation Division.

The Delaware Dissemination Network (DDN) name was coined to present a coordinated linkage approach to problem solving. The DDN employed a structured approach to problem analysis and resource commitment. The development of a memorandum of agreement (MOA) allowed all parties to focus on who was to do what, and who was to provide what resources. Providing the linkage assistance in problem definition and needs assessment, as mentioned above, is the initial activity of the DDN. Once the array of potential solutions is reviewed by the school staff and a solution selected, then either (1) a linker from the project or other SEA staff member will help the district with information resources and assist in implementing the changes or (2) if an NDN project is selected, the state facilitator will assist in the effort. Through coordinated linkage, the appropriate SEA resources were focused on (linked to) the district's problems.

The experiences of our linkers contributed directly to developing the Delaware Educational Improvement Model (DEIM). DEIM, subsequently, was adopted as an operational gestalt for the department's instructional services activities. The linkage concepts and activities were institutionalized but the role of a separate linker for school improvement was not accepted as an efficient mode of operation. Now, all of the instructional supervisors in the SEA are to link their clients to the resource base. This process has not been in effect long enough to evaluate its effectiveness.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM STATUS UPON PROJECT COMPLETION

Prior to FY 1976	After FY 1980
Resources	
--ERIC collection available but unused	--On line retrieval through Dialog enabled ERIC searches to be performed

Prior to FY 1976	After FY 1980
Resources (Cont'd)	
--No ERIC or other social science data base searches were performed to support SEA/LEA school improvement efforts	--Over 3,000 searches have been performed FY 1976 - 475; FY 1977 - 521; FY 1978 - 575; FY 1970 - 672; FY 1980 - 775)
--Limited periodic newsletter, education lab and center publications	--Holdings expanded by over 75 publications
--No special collections for educational issues relating to women, minorities and the aged	--Files were developed to include publications and studies from organizations, institutes, and government agencies
--No human resource file of SEA curriculum and evaluation supervisors existed	--SEA file was developed in FY 1978
--No ERIC fiche were duplicated	--Over 4,000 fiche per year are duplicated and disseminated
--No comprehensive system for accessing the state's education resources existed	--Systematic coordination of educational resources in Delaware and with national sources through the RDX
--Limited resource linkage with other agencies, libraries, and higher education resource centers	--Expanded linkage with state government agencies, Delaware Division of Libraries, Learning Resource Centers (special education), and the University of Delaware's Center for Educational Leadership
--No clearinghouse for referrals	--Library Information Center offered a central location for information and referral services for school personnel

Prior to FY 1976	After FY 1980
Resources (Cont'd)	
--No access to nationally validated programs	--State Facilitator files are available for distribution to information requesters. Technical assistance is provided on a need and follow-up basis.
Linkage	
--No resource awareness and utilization inservice activities for educators	--Inservice training was conducted for all SEA supervisors and these supervisors now act as linkers to the information service

EQUITY

The capacity building project enabled all school districts in Delaware to benefit, on an equal basis, from the use of current and comprehensive information resources. Prior to this effort, only the larger and/or more wealthy districts had access to comprehensive information resources. The equity that precipitated from the dissemination work was one of providing equal access to all districts and schools while lessening the tendency to duplicate success; equity through coordination. Districts ranging from 700 students to our maxi district of over 50,000 students had equal access to our information resources.

Special efforts to promote information use in those districts most in need of information services have been ongoing. Special information collections have been developed to assure access to the educational concerns of minority groups, including women and the elderly. The resources supported the effort of (1) the SEA supervisor of sex equity in vocational education, (2) the desegregation effort in New Castle County School System, and (3) the Governor's project to make schools available to the elderly and to include the teaching about aging in our school curriculum.

IMPACT

Direct indicators of impact of disseminated information are almost impossible to attain. How does one assess the quality of a decision that would have been made if it were not for information? The question is rhetorical. Therefore, impact must be assessed from what clients say about impact and the variety of activities that visably use information.

Users and repeat users in responding to evaluation questions about the usefulness and application of the information indicate information is largely used for planning and the improvement of curriculum and instruction. 98% of the evaluators indicate that the information sent by the Library is relevant.

The use of information is evident in proposals for funding. Many proposals now include a reasonably comprehensive needs assessment and review of the literature - both a direct result of having access to information. SEA evaluators and program managers agree that project proposals' quality has improved as more information was being used. These same managers also promoted the use of information in developing the proposals.

The Delaware Education Assessment Program's state testing effort is a very visable user of information. Each school district must analyze its test results and plan a remedial program. These plans are based in current research and information, and annually submitted to the State Legislature. As the instructional supervisors work in the schools, they use test scores and other information while acting as linkers between the school and the information base.

It may also be assumed that the indepth information collections and studies such as desegregation, math and Language Arts resource units, alternative schools, competency-based education, writing resource guide,

and how to use the results of research had an impact.

In the staff development sector, the project impacted on two groups - SEA staff and LEA staff. All instructional supervisors from DPI were trained by project staff and Research for Better Schools in linkage skills. This training continues. Over the term of the project, 20 school inservice programs were held at school sites. Additionally, demonstrations were held at the education fairs, state PTA meetings, and higher education facility meetings.

Over sixty "What's Happening" newsletters have been disseminated to select audiences. A select audience, for instance, is special education teachers. A newsletter for special education teachers may include (1) a few current research findings and note the availability of the study, (2) synthesis papers available from the information, (3) research reports available from national clearinghouses, and (4) reminders about how to use the information services.

The classic dissemination construct is one of a two-way sharing of information. The feedback loop is very evident in our dissemination efforts. Summary information about the issues and concerns coming from the schools is assembled and made available to SEA staff. Paralleling this are the many times that SEA staff members are part of the search response. Through these strategies the two-way dissemination process is very active in Delaware and certainly has an impact.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF PROJECT

The benefits of this project are past, present, and future. Past benefits are all those endeavors that have used information and field services to improve programs and/or solve problems. Present benefits

accrue to all actors in Delaware's education enterprise through the availability of comprehensive and current information and research. Future benefits will be those stemming from the institutionalization of the dissemination services in the Department of Public Instruction, an ongoing user-oriented service, and the various client groups.